

HOW THE MINISTRY OF THE MISSIONARY OBLATES OF MARY IMMACULATE INFLUENCED MY LIFE

Submitted by Anne Hales

Once upon a time there was a meeting of priests - Jesuits, Redemptorists and Oblates. Suddenly the lights went out. The Jesuits tried to discern what happened; the Redemptorists were thinking of who they could call for help; an Oblate simply replaced the burned out light bulb.

My name is Anne Hales. I am married to Paul and we have children and grandchildren.

I have been working with the Oblates for 30 years at Queen of Apostles in Mississauga, where, with Father Chris Pulchny as Director, I happily continue my ministry today.

Although I knew some Oblate priests growing up, I was re-introduced to the Oblate Mission through Father Michael Smith at the Centre. I didn't even realize I was searching for something more, spiritually, in my life until I attended a women's retreat weekend. This was to be just the beginning each year for the next ten years I continued to attend retreats and each retreat brought me to a deeper personal experience of God.

The hunger for God also led me to the Centre for some quiet time in the private chapel on a regular basis. I purchased and read many spiritual books from the bookstore and started to come to Fr. Smith for spiritual direction.

Father asked me to come for a mid-week retreat, alone. Then I was asked to share a word or two about my experience. What came to me was: "Here I Am Lord ... I will go Lord, if you lead me I will hold Your people in my heart." It was at this time that Father Smith asked me to leave my parish ministry and join the Oblate team preaching retreats. I began my retreat ministry working with diverse groups from students to seniors and everyone in between, but it also included doing payroll, payables and promotion.

I told Father I was afraid. He said: simply share the story of how God is present in your everyday life and who God is for you. Retreatants need feminine input. He also sent me for training - a week-long workshop on the “Ways and Means of Preaching Retreats” in Notre Dame, then Scripture courses at St. Michael’s College, a one year course with the Jesuits in spiritual direction along with a practicum by Father John Veltri and the year-long 19-Annotations with a spiritual director. This, along with our annual North American Conference of Oblate Retreat Centre meetings, where many talks are given on the Oblate Founder, charism and mission, all helped form my spiritual growth.

I was privileged to have Father Mike as my mentor. He was a true Oblate at the service of God’s people, not only preaching from the heart but also plunging a blocked toilet, cutting the grass, and snow removal. In addition, Father celebrated Mass at the Felician Sisters convent every day. He “walked the talk”.

On the occasion of the canonization of St. Eugene de Mazenod December 3, 1995, I was asked to introduce him to employees at Queen of Apostles. Preparing that talk, by reading about his life and talking to him in prayer, I truly began to grow in my desire to join the Oblates in their mission to evangelize and serve the poor, with their many faces.

Today my feet find their own way to the Oblate chapel each morning to pray with them the morning Office. I have ministered with many dedicated Oblates over the years and of special mention with Father John Mazur for almost 25 years, a wonderful Oblate with a gentle spirit, warm hospitality, and a great addition to the preaching team.

Queen of Apostles is my home away from home. My husband and family have supported my ministry which is a confirmation that I am where God has called me to be.

On the occasion of the 200 Years of Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, I pray that all Oblates continue to serve the people of God as He calls them, and that Mother Mary holds them lovingly close to her heart.